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The Role of the National Forests
in the Economy of the Ozark Region

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Arkansas is blessed with a bounty of natural resources. Fifty percent of the state is covered with forest. In the Ozarks, rough topography, clear and free-flowing streams, and a favorable climate make this region an island of relatively unspoiled naturalness.

Naturalness, however, is only a part of the Arkansas environment.

For decades that naturalness has been modified by other development. The area has been an important source of oil, natural gas, coal, and other minerals. Its growing light industry has the advantages of well-developed hydroelectric power--admittedly at the expense of some whitewater rivers.

Agriculture, once the dominant industry, is still strong. King cotton has given way to livestock pastures and fish farms. Soybeans now grow where bottomland hardwood forests once stood.

Paved highways through the Ozarks have made tourism a mainstay of the state economy. Increased access also has brought the development of retirement villages. Population declines of the mid-century have been reversed. Arkansas today is working toward accommodation to the influx of people.

The management and goals of the Ozark-St. Francis and Ouachita National Forests in Arkansas have been, and will continue, making an important contribution to the state's development. These publicly owned forests make up 16 percent of all forest lands in the state. The major issue I will discuss

Remarks of M. Rupert Cutler, Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, before the Ozark Society meeting, Huntsville, Arkansas, November 3, 1979

this afternoon is how I expect these national forests to be managed to serve the needs of the people of the Ozarks, and at the same time contribute to certain national goals.

A basic principle for management of the 188-million-acre national forest system is that the national forests should provide public benefits that cannot be supplied by private land. That is because economic incentives for the private landowners are absent. This principle requires national forest management to be responsive to long-term local needs.

A current trend in Ozark agriculture illustrates the way needs should influence national forest management.

Traditionally, the national forests, along with other forest lands, have provided woodland grazing. Over the past several years, however, there has been a major increase in livestock numbers, and a corresponding increase in improved pasture lands. This expanded use of improved pastures may well affect the supplemental use of grazing on the national forests of Arkansas.

Grazing areas of these forests also provide wildlife habitat. The demands for wildlife habitat in the Ozarks are spiralling upward. By 1985, annual participation in activities such as sightseeing, birdwatching, and wildlife photography are expected to exceed 2 million visitor-days in the national forests of Arkansas. Visitor-days for hunting and fishing are expected to be over 1 million each. These more than double the visitor-days recorded 10 years ago.

Expanded recreation uses in the Ozarks will require further development of recreation sites--both within and outside the national forests. State and local governments and the private sector appear to be interested primarily in

offering highly developed recreation sites. Therefore, the role of the national forests in responding to recreation needs will be to provide the natural, more primitive types of sites.

Wilderness, of course, provides the most primitive recreation site possible. Of equal importance, however, is the opportunity provided by large areas of wilderness for ecological processes to work freely, for a gene pool of native species of plants and animals to survive, and for endangered species to be protected. These functions of wilderness areas make them important for scientific research and educational activities. Their undisturbed characteristics can be used as a baseline against which scientists can compare ecological changes found on disturbed and managed sites.

Publicly owned lands logically are the primary source of wilderness areas, though some privately held lands--such as land owned by the Nature Conservancy--also protect wilderness values. Natural boundaries for wilderness areas often extend across state lines. There is little economic incentive for private owners to keep large tracts undeveloped. Therefore, state and federal governments, by necessity, have the lead in establishing and maintaining wilderness areas.

The mention of wilderness often leads to discussions about job opportunities. How will wilderness allocations affect employment in a specific area?

Most everyone agrees that a wilderness designation provides a most esthetically and environmentally satisfying land allocation result, but that result will be unacceptable if it adds to unemployment and reduces living standards for people.

Jobs in Arkansas are strongly tied to tourism, agriculture, and light industry. The manufacture of wood products is a primary state industry. And that leads us to timber--the need for timber and the jobs associated with timber production.

The increasing demand for timber production in the Ozarks reflects the growing demand nationwide. In the past, farm ownerships have been major suppliers of forest products--particularly hardwoods. However, forest acreage on farms has been declining because of diversion to pasture, soybeans, and other uses. By 1990, it is estimated that only 8 percent of the Ozarks timber supply will come from farmlands as compared to 21 percent 10 years ago.

Private forest industries are expected to increase their contribution to the timber supply. However, they probably will concentrate on softwood production.

About one-half of the forested lands, mostly in hardwoods, are expected to remain in small ownerships in 1990. They will continue to be subjected to a variety of uses that limit their value for hardwood timber.

These projections are important because the demand for hardwood sawtimber from the Ozarks in 1990 is expected to be 5 million cubic feet more than it was 10 years ago.

The increased demand for commercial hardwoods, the reduction of farm forest lands, and the concentration of industry forests on softwoods puts responsibility squarely on the national forests to help fill the gap. This responsibility requires that when sites are equally suitable for hardwoods or softwoods, the production of hardwoods should be favored. However, even under such a stringent management directive, our estimates indicate that the national forests can provide only 50 percent of the hardwood demand in the Ozarks by 1990. The land capability exists, but there is not enough time for the necessary growth to occur.

If future demands for wood products are to be met, the Forest Service and the citizens of the Ozarks must work together to increase the amount of timber coming from non-federal forest lands. Together we must find means to provide technical assistance for forest management, financial incentives, and marketing mechanisms that will induce small woodlot owners to utilize their hardwood timber for continuing income. People in the Ozarks may even want to explore the need for state legislation that will promote a continuing flow of timber from private lands.

The Forest Service can help you meet Ozark area needs for job opportunities in wood product industries, while at the same time you both work to protect the environment.

The Forest Service also increases employment for local people through the work experience and job training programs of the Job Corps, the Young Adult Conservation Corp (YACC), and the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC).

The Job Corps has two centers in Arkansas--one at Ozark and one at Royal, near Hot Springs. The centers offer training in automotive tasks, building maintenance, carpentry, masonry, heavy equipment, painting, plastering, welding, and cooking. Eighty-five percent of the 470 people who completed training at the two centers in 1979 were placed on jobs, in school, or in the Armed Forces.

The YACC provides a year's worth of conservation work on the national forest and other public lands for young men and women who are out of school and out of work. In 1979, there were 75 YACC enrollees in Arkansas.

YCC provides summer employment for 15- to 18-year old's from all segments of society. It gives them a chance to learn about the natural environment while doing needed conservation work on public lands. The Forest Service employs some of the enrollees. Under federal-state cost-sharing, states also run YCC programs. Last year, the Forest Service and the state of Arkansas provided YCC employment for 363 youths.

Both YACC and YCC provide labor-intensive conservation work.

Participants build nature trails, rehabilitate and build recreation facilities, plant trees, clean up natural disaster damage, and carry out many other activities with environmental benefits for people and wildlife.

We are sincerely committed to developing programs that meet the needs of local areas while carrying out national responsibilities required by Congress. Our land management plans for any forest unit must respond to both local and national needs. These plans will be carried out according to the goals of the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA). These goals are being updated for 1980 and will establish ranges of objectives for all Forest Service resources, including wilderness.

One of the five major objectives of the RPA is to give the American public an active role in the national forest planning process. Your attitudes, desires, and actions can affect resource use. The Ozark Society represents points of view essential to the management of eastern national forests.

The origins of the eastern national forests strongly influence their management. The lands on which eastern national forests were established have long been affected by human activity. They were heavily logged to provide timber for wagons, bridges, barns, homes, and industrial buildings. They were crossed and criss-crossed with roads. Wildfire burned over much of this land. Erosion ravaged bare soil with gullies. Fragmented landownership patterns and nearness to metropolitan centers also affected their management.

Activities in these forests and adjacent private lands constantly interact in ways affecting water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, type and quality of recreational opportunity, and timber production.

A variety of authorities--federal, regional, multi-state, state, multicounty, and local--plan and manage interdependent land and water resources.

Competition among users of public and private natural resources is intense and often precludes a balance of uses that satisfies everyone.

Even wilderness for the eastern national forests is sufficiently unique that Congress passed special legislation to make eastern wilderness areas possible.

That is why it is essential, in developing recommendations for wilderness, that we listen to the points of view of people living in and near the areas to be affected.

You are well acquainted with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recent Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) effort.

We all know that despite considerable public participation in this process, the resulting decisions did not satisfy everyone. The department and the President, therefore, used criteria of area selection in addition to local opinion.

For example: within a reasonably sized national package of recommended areas, we avoided adverse effects on people and communities. We assured diversity of landform, ecosystem, and wildlife and provided for accessibility and wide distribution within the total set of areas. We considered all of these criteria in our decisions for the nationwide system of wilderness.

I am pleased to say that, as a result of RARE II, the recommended increases for eastern wilderness total 567,700 acres. This would bring the total to more than 1.6 million acres. For the Ouachita and Ozark National Forests, the recommended increase in wilderness is 24,700 acres. In addition, 38,300 acres were allocated for further study.

I have read your report on the RARE II effort. Even though you did not agree to the process, you did consent to use it. I believe this demonstrates the Society's open-minded perspective and willingness to work with us toward an overall favorable goal.

Although our final recommendations did not parallel your proposal, three of the four areas you recommended for the Ozark National Forest were recommended either for wilderness or further study. It may not be what you asked for; but from where I stand, your batting average looks pretty good.

You have also made known your concerns on other issues about the national forests and natural resources, and those concerns have been recognized.

One is stream preservation. Arkansas still has many beautiful, free-flowing streams and a good supply of water.

We understand your concern about the traditional use of dams, levees, dredging, and channel modification for stream management. It is precisely awareness by groups like yours of the generally adverse ecological consequences of such practices that has led to a shift toward nonstructural solutions for flood prevention and drainage. Nonstructural water management offers exceptional opportunities for complementary greenway development and recreation use...and we will use these nonstructural approaches in Arkansas.

The Soil Conservation Service has embraced a newly broadened natural resource mission and will be giving consideration to nonstructural alternatives in its small watershed projects. The Forest Service also gives special attention to the protection of natural streams and important riparian, or streamside, habitat.

Closely associated with stream preservation is the preservation of wetlands. Although they are by far our most productive wildlife lands, their value goes beyond that. Wooded swamps and seasonally flooded hardwood forests are important commercially. Wetlands also reduce flood peaks and maintain streamflow in spring and fall. They improve water quality by serving as nutrient traps. They remove suspended sediment from water.

Despite these important values, the nation has been losing an average of 500,000 acres of wetlands a year through draining, filling, or conversion to other uses. The Soil Conservation Service is pushing forward with plans to reverse this trend.

As you know, we have a national policy providing for a Wild and Scenic Rivers System. In legislation sent by President Carter to Congress early last month, three new rivers would be added to this system--two in Colorado and one in Idaho.

Perhaps the new state Natural and Scenic Rivers Commission established by Governor Clinton can identify some worthy Arkansas candidates for similar national designation. I understand that the Piney, Illinois Bayou, and Kings rivers have previously been considered for designation--and may be again. Jim Crouch, supervisor of the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests, will be working closely with the Commission on matters relating to Forest Service lands.

In our efforts to develop programs and to work with the public, our objective is to provide and promote balanced use and management of the varied resources of the national forests--as well as all other natural resources--that serve the needs of all Americans.

I recently read in the Arkansas Gazette a "Letter to the Editor" by Bill Wiggins of your organization. Bill wrote: "Without bowing to short-term thinkers, it is possible for us to opt for reasonable programs: conservation, more efficient material usage, recycling and reclamation, and exploration within public and private lands not designated for wilderness status. Many changes and adjustments in the way in which we lead our lives may be necessary, but these can occur in harmony with the overall national interest and without the sacrifice of our supporting base systems."

Bill, I believe you're right on track with this position. I believe it supports what we in the department are trying to achieve.

I have a great deal of respect for the goals and objectives of the Ozark Society. In 16 years, you have become recognized nationally. Your work is welcomed and appreciated by many. I am fully aware of your efforts to provide sound input to forest planning efforts in Arkansas over the past several years.

We need the help of organizations like yours. You have cooperated with us openly and vigorously in the past. We look forward to continuing this productive relationship.

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